



Date of Council Work Session: July 22, 2013

**TOWN OF LEESBURG
TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

Subject: Downtown Improvements Project – Communications Plan

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Recommendation: Update and information only at this time. A staff recommendation will be presented to Town Council in the fall.

Issue: The development of a communications plan for the downtown improvements project.

Background: The first phases of the downtown improvements project have been completed with improvements to both alleyways between South King Street and the Town garage, and to the East End Triangle by Mom's Apple Pie. The second phase of construction is currently underway on Church Street between Royal Street and Loudoun Street, and will begin soon on Loudoun Street between Church Street and King Street.

The next phase of improvements along Loudoun Street will be from Church Street to the East End Triangle. The remaining phase of improvements will be on King Street from Cornwall Street to Royal Street.

During the construction in the alleyways and at the East End Triangle, staff maintained regular communications with the affected property owners through daily contact and email blasts. A key to effective communications during this construction was to work individually with each property owner on the construction's impact to their business. Some examples included working directly with The Reign of Cats and Dogs business to permit construction during their slowest periods, and to maintain access to their business during construction. Another example included working with Mom's Apple Pie by shutting down all construction during the week of Thanksgiving, and working hours when the respective business was not open to customers.

On the Church Street and Loudoun Street projects that are either currently underway or starting soon, staff has continued with the same approach by communicating regularly with all businesses impacted by the construction and working on solutions to accommodate the unique needs of each business. An example of this was working with the Cajun Experience Restaurant on their parking needs while also remaining in communication with Puccios.

In regards to the future King Street improvements, construction is expected to start in the summer of 2014. Since King Street (Route 15 Business) is a major transportation corridor, a more comprehensive effort is recommended inclusive of an overall marketing campaign for downtown Leesburg until all improvements are completed.

In order to support such an initiative, it is anticipated that the Town will hire temporary, part-time support to maintain regular communications with downtown stakeholders, and to implement a marketing plan. The communications effort will focus on the downtown businesses, but will also target the larger community, commuters, and visitors to our area. Communications will be coordinated with our standard efforts via the Town web site, but will also include social mediums like Facebook and Twitter while involving the support of the Leesburg Economic Development Commission, the Leesburg Downtown Business Association, and Visit Loudoun. Town staff will also coordinate project briefings for all downtown businesses at various times throughout the project.

The marketing campaign should focus on the positive benefits of the downtown improvements versus just the construction impact. It will also contribute to more clearly identifying public parking, and extending the promotional efforts of the downtown during construction. A goal will be to maximize previously established opportunities such as First Fridays, Acoustics on the Green, Bluemont Concerts, Town parades, and Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony.

While the plan is not complete, and more details are needed, the communications plan will strive to ensure regular and accurate information to all parties impacted by the downtown improvements. The staff's goal is to be in regular communication with multiple parties through various mediums about the progress of the project.

In terms of next steps, staff will bring an action item to Council in the fall with specific recommendations inclusive of details and related costs.